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To what degree our manufactures should be protected by our imposts is a question, on which we shall not enter. That some protection should be afforded, is a principle, which we consider as settled in the minds of a great majority of our countrymen, and which has been avowed and adopted by our government ever since the days of Hamilton. We find that the tariff of 1824 was opposed by Mr Webster, and many of its ablest adversaries, not on the abstract principle that manufactures should be left to themselves, but on the ground, that, admitting the reverse of this principle to be true, the bill itself was injudicious and unreasonable. Hence all questions, which can arise in Congress on the encouragement of manufactures, will, probably, be viewed as questions of *more or less*, and whether a tariff shall be passed or not must depend almost wholly on its details.

Our author's principal aim, in his remarks on this country, seems to be rather to present a picture of her future progress, than to describe her actual condition, or to suggest any precise course of foreign or domestic policy. We cannot feel perfectly confident of the complete fulfilment of his splendid anticipations, though we assure him it is for any other reason, than because we should regret to see them verified. But we trust it argues no despair of our republic, still less any indifference to her welfare, to look on the speculations of the ablest men with some degree of diffidence. If the political events of the last twenty years have impressed any lesson on our minds, it is the truth of the utter uncertainty of all political anticipations. What will be the precise rank of our country among the nations of the earth in power and wealth we consider only a secondary question. It is enough for us, that though not the greatest, we are the happiest of nations, and that our happiness is as secure as the lot of humanity will permit, from every one but ourselves.

ART. IX.—1. *Almack's*. A Novel. 2 vols. 12mo. New York. 1827.

2. *Vivian Grey*. Part I. and Part II. 3 vols. 12mo. Philadelphia. 1827.

THIS is, emphatically, the age of novel writing; and as such will be undoubtedly characterized in the annals of English

literature. We of the present generation can hardly estimate our own good fortune, in having lighted upon this prolific and entertaining epoch. Thrice blessed is the man who first devised these agreeable fictions ; which so sweetly soothe the dull ear of sickness ; exalt the fainting spirit with draughts that 'cheer but not inebriate' ; brighten the horrors of a rainy day ; dispel the tedium of a winter's evening ; and even give zest and animation to that saddest of all earthly formalities, a family party. Who has not witnessed the instantaneous effect produced on the dull, invariable visages of such a circle, by the appearance of the novel ; the muscle dilated into the sympathetic smile ; or the eye, as the plot deepens, suffused with the tear of sensibility ; while the reader, animated by the magical effects of his own voice, secretly imputes to himself half the merit which belongs to his author.

Happy indeed for us is it, that our lot was not cast in those thorny times, when 'Doctors hight Irrefragable,' Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, and others, filled the world with interminable disputes on quiddities and entities, the *nugæ difficiles*, which, John of Salisbury assures us, 'were the constant amusement, even of old men who had lost all powers of disputation themselves,' but who loved to linger over these fascinating tomes of dialectics. We should hardly expect much diversion from this sort of light reading. Even in the golden days of Queen Bess, things were not materially better. Those, indeed, who had no objection to a pestilential congregation of vapors, might find abundance of merriment with Will Shakspeare and Ben Jonson, in the little Globe theatre. But plays were not printed in those days till long after they had become stale. And those quiet personages who preferred the pleasures of the fireside, were obliged to extract their mirth from the dismal affectations of the 'unparalleled Lilly', or the pastoral insipidities of Sir Philip Sidney. In later times, when 'civil dudgeon first grew high', polemics and politics were the only fashionable staple of the day ; and even in the ripe age of Queen Anne, although things brightened somewhat, and such adventurous personages as Robinson Crusoe, Captain Gulliver, and Martin Scriblerus, began to make their way in the world, yet they were few and *longo intervallo* ; while the ordinary bill of fare consisted of a poetical squib, or a periodical essay, served up with coffee and rolls, and disposed of in much the same time. In short, it is truly astonishing how our good ancestors, before the latter half

of the last century, contrived to dispose of the long evenings and dull rainy days, which doubtless were quite as frequent, and afflicted the hypocondriacs of that age as sorely, as those of ours.

We live to see a new order of things; '*ab integro sæclorum nascitur ordo.*' Multitudes of wits of the first water, toil by day, and nightly 'outwatch the bear', to furnish dainties for our epicurean palates. In other words, the press daily, nay hourly, teems with works of fiction, of no contemptible quality; the dry precepts of morality are seasoned with the sallies of a lively wit; barren historical fact is adorned with the graceful coloring of taste and sentiment; the muse of history, indeed, has condescended to take this department of fiction under her especial care; characters, modes of thought, and habits of society, are depicted with singular fidelity; novels and romances, no longer unprofitable, become the pleasing vehicles of truth; and thus, in spite of the old adage, a royal road has been opened to much genuine and substantial knowledge.

A problem worth considering, but which our limits will barely allow us to hint at, is, why this species of elegant literature is so peculiarly suited to English genius, that it has never flourished to any extent among any other people. The nations of the continent, the Spaniards, Italians, and French, particularly the two former, so prolific in every variety of invention, have little to boast of in this way. The Spanish *picaresco* tales may indeed be reckoned in the same general class of fictions. They represent, with great uniformity, some young adventurer, born of nobody, lying and thieving his way through the world, pilfering larders, picking pockets, and playing off all sorts of jokes practical, upon such unfortunate personages as happen to fall in his way. The adventures of Scipio, in *Gil Blas*, a novel, by the by, infinitely superior to any thing which the Spaniards have in this line, are a good sample of this kind of writing. The invention of this humorous, but humble sort of romance, is due to a Castilian grandee, none of the meekest of his *caste* either; and the finest wits of Spain, among the rest Cervantes, have since repeatedly condescended to imitate it. Its value, however, cannot be rated very high; it can boast of little variety; the range of characters discussed, is extremely limited, and, for the most part, of the meanest sort; as if Castilian dignity was afraid of being compromised, by being brought into the face. There is no great expense of wit required for

devising or describing the pranks of malicious roguery ; and it must be remembered, that the nearer the exhibitions of bawds, sharpers, and beggars approach the truth, the more vulgar and offensive they necessarily become. Don Quixote, in spite of the highly charged, chivalrous caricature, which forms the basis of it, contains more genuine effusions of taste and sentiment, with a wider and better delineated portraiture of life, both high and low, than is to be met with in any other Spanish romance, with which we are acquainted.

But the Italians, first, among the nations of Europe, naturalized the *Novelle* ; which may be regarded as the

‘ fonte

Che spande di parlar sì largo fiume ;’

as the spring from which have issued abundant streams of prosaic fiction in our own literature. ‘The Fiametta’, too, of Boccaccio is cited as the model of the modern amatory romance. But the resemblance will be found to be rather nominal than real. A novel, which makes its machinery out of heathen deities, can scarcely be reckoned in conformity with our notions. Besides, such long works of invention in prose have never been patronised by the Italians ; although it must be acknowledged, that one or two successful attempts, in this way, mostly imitations, have been made during the last century.

The brief *Novella* has ever been a prodigious favorite with the nation, and has been assiduously cultivated by them, since the days of Boccaccio. It may be generally described, as exhibiting short animated sketches of common life, intrigues and adventures not the most decorous, with abundance of *persiflage* on the priests, monks, &c. all introduced with bewitching *naïveté*, and varnished over with the richest coloring of the most beautiful of modern languages. This last quality is indispensable. These characteristics, of course, are not to be understood as equally applying to all. The Tales of Sacchetti, for instance, are little more than a farrago of drolleries, such as are to be found in a modern Encyclopedia of Wit. So that it is difficult to account for their pertinacious popularity, on any other principle, than that of the taste for gossip, which pervades, more or less, every class of the Italians. Now whatever be the merits of literary execution appertaining to these works, they must be reckoned, in an intellectual point of view, immeasurably below English fictions of the same class ; since they exhibit little of the careful dissection of character, of the inge-

nious perplexities of plot, that stimulate, yet perpetually disappoint the reader's curiosity ; of the gradual, yet full development of passion ; or of the brisk interchange of repartee, the mercurial and often highly intellectual conversation, which enrich the pages of the English novel.

Now, what is the cause of this superiority of the latter ? It is not certainly a want of fancy or creative power, in the people of the South. The Spanish drama, it is well known, has furnished plots and intrigues for half the theatres of Europe. And some of their writers have been proverbial miracles of invention. Still less can such deficiency be imputed to the Italians, as well may vouch their multitudinous and unrivalled creations of the epic muse.

We must look for it, first, in the condition of the nations who are the subject of these fictions, and secondly, in that of the authors themselves. The most ample materials for popular fiction will undoubtedly be found in a country whose political institutions allow an entire freedom of social intercourse, and consequently a perfect display of character ; where an equal security of personal and civil rights encourages, in every individual, the entire development of his intellectual and moral energies, in the career best suited to his genius, of ambition or of wealth ; and where this entire freedom of selection and action in the commerce of life, has distributed society into a multitude of classes, each independent of the others, and set in distinct relief by its own peculiar habits of thought and occupation. It is these circumstances, which have prepared an inexhaustible variety of character and incident for the English novelist ; which have furnished the simple, unsophisticated pleasures of rustic life for Goldsmith ; the fearlessness, rough cordiality, and popular humor of the lower classes, for Fielding and Smollet ; the affectations, sentimental intrigue, and vapid fashionable chitchat of fine life, for Miss Burney ; the tender sympathies, vexations, and intrigues of domestic privacy, which go to make up the somewhat overgrown family pieces of Richardson ; and finally, which have furnished Scott with the rich variety of materials that he has crowded into his magnificent and motley panorama.

But whatever advantages may be presented to the novelist in the condition of the nation, they will be all ineffectual, if the free expression of his own sentiments be controlled by any other power than public opinion ; if an inquisitorial police,

whether in the shape of an academy or of a censorship, is to check the natural expansion of thought, of invention, of colloquial intercourse, which constitute the charm of this kind of writing. Yet in what other country, beside England and our own happy land, does this intellectual independence exist, even at this enlightened day?

If we apply our preceding remarks to the situation of Spain and Italy, we shall find obvious reason for their inferiority in domestic fiction. The former nation may be considered as divided into two great classes, of which the one, monopolizing wealth, power, and rank, is too much degraded by ignorance and superstition, to afford agreeable models for the study of the novelist; and the other, perhaps still more degraded by their political abasement, is even less fit for his purposes. We find none of those diversified ranks of citizens, who, as the middling class, constitute the bulk of most free communities, who, supported by successful enterprise, and by a just confidence in their own independence, display in all their strength the natural energies of their character. Even if there were some exceptions to all this, how could we expect that the writers in such a country would venture on a bold and popular expression of their sentiments; or that thought could freely expand under the baleful shade of the Inquisition?

In Italy, however, it is somewhat different. The courteous temper and gregarious habits of the people, their universal relish for elegant and even intellectual recreations, the multiplied monuments of art and grandeur, that must touch the most torpid sense, might seem to present the most agreeable illustrations for romance. And so they might, as far as imagination, or superficial accomplishments are concerned. But we must not expect to find Italy a suitable *studio* for a philosophical artist, who would exhibit the human character in its noblest and most imposing attitudes; as it is developed by that brisk concussion of ideas, that habitual independence of thought and action in the most important concerns of life, which are permitted only to the citizens of a free government. The Italians have been too long oppressed by foreign despotism, too long relaxed by corrupt and effeminate pleasures, to supply either models or masters for such a scientific analysis of the moral phenomena of our nature, as enters into the works of the highest English novelists. Apparently resigned to his condition, the modern Italian seems to derive sufficient satisfaction from the mere

sensation of repose ; and it may be doubted, in this torpidity of his faculties, whether he would consent to be disturbed by any more potent appeal, than an agreeable, though impotent sally of imagination. The harmonious organization of their language has also still further operated to the discouragement of long fictions in prose, with the Italians. Generally endowed with an exquisite sensibility to verbal melody, and desirous of combining, at the same time, as many *jouissances* as possible, they look upon verse as the only suitable vehicle of fancy ; as is sufficiently attested by the patience with which they resign themselves to their interminable epics in *ottava rima*.

In the general progress of knowledge and of the understanding, the French are as decidedly superior to the nations we have been considering, as in the mere province of the imagination they are inferior to them. And during the last century in particular, they have been confessedly no less distinguished for their proficiency in the higher branches of moral and metaphysical science, than their English neighbors. It might therefore be expected, that they would have carried somewhat of this spirit of philosophy into their fictitious compositions ; and that they would have made some effort to investigate in these the latent springs of human conduct. In this attempt they have partially succeeded, and their evident inferiority to the English on the whole, must be imputed to several causes, which we will enumerate.

On the regeneration of letters, it is singular, that the French should have been more eminent for originality of invention, than any other people of Europe. Their *fabliaux* and romances, their Trouveurs and Troubadours, were the delight and the study of other European nations, the models of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and of Chaucer. It would seem as if this precocity of talent in a barbarous age, like the unseasonable maturity of some vernal flower, had been the occasion of its premature decline. Certain it is, that no highly cultivated literature of modern Europe, betrays such a sterility of fancy as the French ; none which cannot, for example, exhibit a superior epic, the touchstone of poetical invention. Another impediment to the success of this lively people, in the department we are now criticising, is the result of the principles on which the intercourse between the sexes is regulated. In the higher circles of the community, an extreme reserve before marriage, and a licentious indulgence after it, are equally unfavorable to the

gradual expansion of pure and delicate passion, which forms the basis of many, not to say most of our best English romances.

A still greater impediment, is the oppressive influence which the conventional forms of good breeding, or of etiquette, have on the character of the people; obliterating, if we may so say, the moral physiognomy of the individual. So nearly assimilated to each other are all classes by this exterior polish, that without some ostensible distinction in dress, a foreigner would find it no easy matter to discriminate them. Now, whatever be the effect of all this on the civilization of the country, it may readily be conceived to be extremely unpropitious to the purposes of the novelist, whose models, in order to have any merit, must be formed on the naked lineaments of nature. Scarcely less prejudicial to the interests of the novel writer, are those narrow principles of criticism, which, in France, regulate all the productions of taste, and which must go far to extinguish the free, volatile spirit which should animate the creations of fancy. Indeed that very combination of terms, *rules and romance*, has something in it highly paradoxical. How many of the rough gems, which are so lavishly scattered over the works of Smollet, Fielding, and Scott, would be refused admittance into the fastidious cabinet of a French *précieux*! Humor is a quality, in which the French are singularly deficient. Rabelais' buffoonery, and Molière's high caricatures of the affectation and pretensions of Parisian society, are not examples of it; nor is it to be found in the light skirmish of wit, for which the French have a peculiar capacity; nor in the fine *piquant* raillery with which they frequently season (though it is somewhat out of place) their gravest compositions, as history, criticism, &c. That broad, good natured sarcasm, half shrewdness, half blunder, which makes us laugh nearly as much at the speaker, as at what he says or does, is a compound wholly English. Nothing shows more clearly the difference between the two nations, in this particular, than the vulgar caricatures which we see pasted up at shop windows. The English, with all the varieties of broad grin, and whimsical distress, the French, with the same invariable pasteboard physiognomy, polished curls, and costume *à la Parisienne*; so that without the friendly assistance of the label, we are at a loss to distinguish *Jean qui rit*, from *Jean qui pleure*.

But although the French have confined themselves to a more

circumscribed range of action, and have shown less depth of observation than their northern rivals in the field of romantic fiction, yet they have produced in it works of singular beauty. Their first attempts were, contrary to the national habit, conceived in the worst taste possible. The unwieldy romances of Calprenede, Scuderi, &c. had neither the graces of literary finish, nor the least resemblance to nature. But these were soon succeeded by a purer style of composition. Some of their greatest masters in science, as well as letters, have ventured upon this kind of writing; but as they have written with some exclusive philosophical aim, their personages, instead of being true to nature, are only ingenious pieces of mechanism, accommodated to the peculiar system of the author. Other writers of less notoriety have given a warmer coloring of reality to their pictures of life and manners; and among these, especially to be distinguished, certain female authors, whose finer perception of the *convenances* of society, has led them to a more chaste and temperate representation of it. The French romance, in its improved state, in which the salutary example of the English is undoubtedly to be traced, though deficient in any very powerful exhibition of character, is enriched with many beauties of taste and sentiment, and has the enviable merit of maintaining, to the last, a lively interest in the reader.

This talent for *characterization*, or, in other words, the power of calmly scrutinizing the workings of the human heart, and of accurately describing them, has distinguished the best British writers, from the times of the venerable Chaucer to our own. It is no exaggeration to say, that his *Canterbury Tales*, nay, his Prologue to them, contain more original and diversified views of character, than are to be found in all the similar productions of the contemporary Italian novelists. It is surprising, after this complete-success, that the English should have altogether neglected a form of writing so favorable to the display of their peculiar genius. The age of Shakspeare, however, opened a new and brilliant career to dramatic talent; the circle of observation was widely extended; philosophy lent her aid to poetry, and a chart of human character, with all its unknown depths and windings, was laid down with an accuracy which we may look for in vain to any of the masters of antiquity. Succeeding periods were variously distinguished by philosophy, criticism, satire, and other kinds of preceptive writing, which discussed principles of art or of conduct, without much

attempt at invention or at an exhibition of life. In our own age, the spirit of creation has again revived ; the forms of the ancient drama, after some feeble efforts, have been abandoned ; from the despair of finding novelties in a path already so beaten ; or from a higher cultivation of the age, which invites the discussion of deeper matters than can be popularly exhibited in a play ; or perhaps from the improved condition of society, which, with its refined intrigue, its polished intellectual conversation, offers a most inviting field to the novelist. Thus the form of the ancient drama is abandoned, while its spirit is fully revived in the modern novels and romances.

This department of fiction has been a favorite with the English, the last half century ; and it now seems, equally whether we consider its philosophical spirit, or its execution as a work of art, to have reached as high a point of perfection as it can reasonably be expected to attain. In this improved state, it has been purified from most of those frequent violations of taste and morals, which formerly disfigured it ; from the licentiousness of Fielding and Smollet, the sentimentality of Burney and Radcliffe, and the painful elaboration of Richardson. It is now characterized by a pure and manly tone of sentiment, by a familiar acquaintance with the world, by an extensive erudition, and by no ordinary beauties of eloquence. Scott must of course be considered to have been the most efficient agent in producing this revolution ; and from this circumstance he may, like Shakspeare, be taken for the representative of his age. Like him, he has embraced, within his comprehensive glance, every variety of rank, profession, and party ; the principal object of both seems to have been the development of character, without any concern for the disposition of incident, except as far as, by affording new points of view, it may be made subservient to the main purpose. Hence probabilities are frequently violated, and the legitimate limits of the play or novel having been attained, the narration is brought up by a sort of apoplectic termination of the whole *dramatis personæ*. Witness the historical plays of the one, and the novels of the other, *passim*. Another deficiency, peculiar to both these writers, is that of any avowed or implied moral purpose, in most of their fictions. They content themselves with imitating the ordinary course of events in real life ; with scarcely any more equity, than is observed here, in the ultimate distribution of rewards and punishments. Take, for obvious

examples, the *dénouement* of Hamlet, or King Lear, of the Bride of Lammermoor, or St Ronan's Well,—where the same dreadful catastrophe overwhelms alike the innocent and the guilty. Perhaps, however, the influence of their writings has not been less salutary on this account. An exhibition of the misery, the mental disquietude inseparable from guilt, may be sufficiently impressive. A moral, on the other hand, sturdily inculcated or illustrated in every page, as is the case with Miss Edgeworth, or which in any degree diverts the current of events from their natural course, occasions a violence to probability, revolting both to the taste and conviction of the reader. Both seem to have possessed the remarkable faculty of abstracting themselves from self, if we may so say. Each one of their dramatic entities seems to possess a sort of conscious individuality, as in real life, and the whole of the complicated mechanism moves on, without ever betraying the invisible hand of the master. If anywhere the spirit of the author breaks forth, it is in a goodhumored philosophy, which smiles at the vanities of life, which regards the world as a farce, and the men and women in it as players.

Scott, like his great predecessor, has called in the preternatural, not for vulgar purposes of poetical interest only, but for the illustration of popular superstition, and like him, he has made fiction the vehicle of historic truth; the form of his work has obviously given him greater scope for the exposition of his national antiquities; and the superior opulence of his literary acquirements has enabled him to enrich his compositions with a much greater variety of information.

Both are profound in the knowledge of men, but Shakspeare seems to have been endowed with a finer perception of the character of women; at least he has far surpassed his rival in the exhibition of tender and romantic passion. In everything relating to the sex, indeed, he is a warmer colorist than Scott. We will pursue the parallel no farther, and only remark in conclusion, that as the one is the greatest poetic, so the other is the greatest prose dramatist of any age or country; an eulogium which will not appear unmerited, if we consider the essence of the drama to consist in developement of character.

The influence of Scott, during the short period of his literary existence, on the taste of his countrymen, is truly surprising. He has given a healthful character to fiction, elevating it above the dull heroics and stale sentiment which deluged our circu-

lating libraries, and teaching the artist by his own example, that the only study worthy of him, is man.

‘Non hîc Centauros, non Gorgonas, Harpyiasque
Invenies : hominem nostra pagina sapit.’

A plentiful crop of imitations has ensued ; many of them of singular beauty ; and sketches of life have been drawn with great truth and vivacity, from the simple ‘Annals of the Parish’ up to the fashion and foppery of ‘Almack’s.’ The impulse has been rapidly communicated to our side of the water. And although the Coryphæus of our native novelists, is wanting in that familiarity with polite life, and in that degree of literary cultivation, which is indispensable in order to give a high finish to works of invention, yet he has with great effect embodied many original conceptions of character and circumstance peculiar to the New World, the more valuable, as the state of things which produced them, is itself rapidly passing away. It may be doubted, however, whether these attempts are not somewhat premature ; whether our country be yet ripe for the purposes of the novelist. The dawn of letters, among every people, has opened with the creations of fancy ; and it is not till after a long interval, that the age of invention is succeeded by one of philosophy and reason. But the position of our own country is materially different ; engrafted on a healthy parent stock, it may hope to produce these mature fruits at a much earlier period. Indeed, the ordinary state of things is entirely reversed with us. We are a young nation, with an old and highly finished literature ; we are oppressed by the very wealth of our inheritance. Every province of the imagination has been preoccupied by a minute and laborious cultivation ; and when we reflect, how rarely from some cause or other the same department has been cultivated with success a second time, we may have some reason for distrusting our immediate achievements in this way. To the progress of knowledge, however, there is no such limit. Science has this advantage over the arts, that from its very nature, the more it is attended to, the more it will be advanced ; every new step must be upward, elevating us to a higher point of view, and opening to us a more unbounded prospect. Science, therefore, practical science, as applied to the improvement of government, and to social happiness, would seem to be the first natural object of attention to our countrymen, and in fact has been so. There is, however, a subdued effort of the imagination, which com-

bined with wit, a knowledge of life, and a high degree of literary finish, forms an agreeable substitute for those bolder flights of invention, that usually distinguish the early period of intellectual culture. Such is novel writing. But such compositions, it is obvious from the constitution of their elements, can only be the product of a highly polished and mature state of society.

The expense of talent, which of late years has been lavished on works of fiction, is matter of regret with some, who regard it as so much diverted from the service of truth and genuine knowledge. Such is not our view of it; and we cannot help thinking, that novels, as they are now conducted, might admit of some very plausible arguments in their favor, even on the ground of the *cui bono*, as compared with history. The moral and social organization of a people, is certainly not less interesting to the philosophical student, than the deeds of violence and intrigue, which chequer the page of history. The poems of Homer have done more to acquaint us with the domestic constitution of the Greeks, than all their histories put together; and where are future generations to obtain so clear a conception of the peculiarities of Scottish character as from the Waverley novels? What a flood of light would one such fiction as Old Mortality throw on the dark features of Roman story, even where it is most illuminated by the prolix pen of Livy, or the brief but effectual touches of Tacitus? History has to do with the outward appearances of things; with actors in masquerade. How often may even an eyewitness be deceived! De Retz has somewhere remarked on the impertinence of writers, 'who in the seclusion of their closets, pretend to suggest the motives of conduct, which he, who was the focus of intrigue, was altogether unable to explain.' On the other hand, fiction has no concern with actions of individuals, but with passions in the abstract, with the moral constitution of man, a subject, from obvious reasons, much less liable to misconception. In a word, history represents events as they are, and men as they appear; while fiction represents events as they appear probable, and men as they are. 'The only difference between me and professed historians,' says the lively Fielding, 'is, that with me everything is true, save the names and the dates, while with them nothing is true but names and dates.' If we glance our eye but lightly over the pages of history, with how many inaccuracies, discrepancies, and monstrous lies, do we find it dis-

figured ! The venerable Asiatic dynasties ; the ‘ tale of Troy divine,’ nay, her very existence, as well as that of her immortal bard ; the heroic and even later ages,

‘ et quidquid Græcia mendax
Audet in historiâ ;’

the four first centuries of royal and republican Rome, so dear to our youthful fancies, from the glorious images of virtue, self-devoted heroism, and generous love of freedom which they present, and which furnished the basis of the fine political fabrics of Machiavelli and Montesquieu ; all crumble into dust under the rude touch of modern criticism. Even the actors of a riper period ; Dionysius the tyrant, the perfidious Philip of Macedon, are now regenerated as patriot princes ; Sylla the scourge, becomes the saviour of his country ; Pompey, the friend of liberty, and Cæsar, its enemy, exchange characters with each other ; and Julian, the scoffer and apostate, shines forth the benevolent and enlightened philosopher. In later ages, the *odium theologicum* has multiplied the sources of historical obliquity ; and the art of printing rapidly scatters to all quarters the inextinguishable seeds of error. Take only one or two familiar examples in our own tongue ; compare Roscoe’s elaborate biographies of Lorenzo and Leo de’ Medici, the disinterested patrons of art, the intrepid statesmen, the friends of virtue and temperate liberty, with the same personages in Sismondi’s Italian History, the selfish sensualists, the cowardly, cunning, and systematic oppressors of their country. Or what may be more familiar still, compare the first volumes of Hume with Lingard, and the last with Brodie, and if it be possible, extract truth from error. But what need of other examples, in an age which has seen Cataline and Borgia deliberately vindicated, and Cromwell and Richard the Third as deliberately eulogized, by writers of undeniable talent. No sooner do we build our conclusions than they are swept away by a new current of facts and inferences into an entirely opposite direction. ‘ Oh ! talk to me not of history,’ said Sir Robert Walpole to his son Horace, ‘ for that I know to be false.’

We say nothing of the popular influence of the novel, as a production of literary art ; since although, from the nature of its construction, far superior in this respect to history, yet it does not essentially differ from that of the general class of ornamental writing to which it belongs. We cannot say that the

historical propensities of our ingenious countryman Irving, and of Sir Walter Scott, as lately developed, fill us with any uncommon satisfaction ; and we cannot help thinking how many merry faces and happy winter evenings are like to be spoiled by this sad sacrifice of romance to reality. Many may doubtless be found to pile up solid facts as well as they ; but who like them can weave the ‘ brittle toils of fancy ? ’ But we are rambling into an unconscionable length of episode, and will conclude with the pious invocation of the poet of romance ;

‘ *Magnanima menzogna, or quando è il vero
Si bello che si possa a te preporre !* ’

We have insensibly indulged in such an amplitude of preliminary remark, that we have very scanty limits left for criticism on the works before us. One of these, ‘ *Almack’s*, ’ is fortunately so stale with most of our readers, as to justify only one or two words respecting it. It is one of that multitudinous growth of fictions which have arisen out of the new impulse given to authorship by the author of *Waverley*. It is, as every one knows, a spirited sketch of fashionable life ; of that class of personages in England, who born with a prescriptive right to rank, wealth, and *ton*, constitute the froth and syllabub of society. We have first, a familiar picture of rural life, in the family of a worthy country squire, much improved since the days of *Squire Western* ; one, indeed, who talks French, and reads the *Quarterly*. Thence we are transported to the neighboring residence of a British peer, with rather a miscellaneous party of ‘ natives ’ and fashionables. The most amusing part of the book, in our opinion, is taken up with the various expedients by which this wellbred community contrive to kill the common enemy ; and brings to our recollection the distress of those unfortunate passengers in one of our belated packets, who, kept together in the sweet bond of union considerably longer than they had anticipated, are scarcely able to disguise, under a thin varnish of decorum, their chagrin and mutual antipathy for each other. For all such constraint, however, they amply indemnify themselves by the liberties which they take with one another behind their backs. The host sacrifices his guests, these in turn, their host ; and both unite in offering up daily hecatombs of departed characters ; ‘ at every word a reputation dies.’ From the country we follow this merry party up to town, where the same wayward goddess,

‘Spleen,
Who rules the sex from fifty to fifteen,’

urges them through a giddy circle of dinners, routs, operas, and Almack's. The point of view here offered to the reader, is the perpetual hostility carried on between time and *ton*, as to which shall kill the other. Fashion presides over the whole scene with necromantic sway ; rank, wealth, beauty, sink alike before her. In every society those qualities will be most prized, which are best adapted to its peculiar spirit ; talent, therefore, in the House of Commons, and *ton* at Almack's. On the whole, the view of things exhibited in this work must be exceedingly consolatory to that numerous class of personages in England, who have had the misfortune to be born without a title and ten thousand a year. The novel is conducted on the same general principles that we described as the basis of modern fiction. Incidents are of very little account, or only so, as far as they afford favorable points of view for the exhibition of character. How different this from the good old-fashioned romances of Miss Burney ; where a long train of intrigue is cautiously prepared through half a dozen volumes, and a person can hardly get up or sit down, without the bustling aid of machinery. The story here is absolutely nothing ; a mere thread, to string together showy conversations and characters. The dialogue is kept up with a good deal of vivacity, and without any unreasonable exaggeration ; indeed much of it is not above the ordinary level of fashionable gossip. There is a certain liveliness of repartee in it, sharpened with a little malice ; a decided inclination visible in the author for this sort of skirmishing ; a deep knowledge of millinery, mantuamaking, and other mysteries of feminine craft ; joined moreover with a certain tact for society, peculiar to the sex, which leave little doubt in our mind, that ‘Almack's’ was written by a woman ; one too, who, with spirit enough to laugh at the heartless insipidities of fashion, has not quite lost her original relish for them.

The general style of the work is pretty equable, seldom rising above a certain *level* ; the poverty of incident being unfavorable to passages of excitement and deep interest. The whole is plentifully bespattered with French phrases ; a foolish affectation of the author, which, however excusable in the mouths of the *dramatis personæ*, as taken from real life, should never have been admitted into the body of the narrative. If

people of fashion in England, continue to cultivate, with their present assiduity, this *patois* of broken English and bad French, they will have occasion again for the old laws of the Plantagenets, prescribing the use of the vernacular.

The First Part of Vivian Grey appeared during the last summer. As well as we recollect its contents, which we have not looked into since, it sets forth the adventures of a youth of genius, a sort of *homme universel*, who, contrary to the old adage, is good at everything he takes in hand. At school he is the terror and torment of his master ; but soon after, indeed before he is out of his teens, we find him settled down in the calm of ‘divine philosophy,’ highly Platonic, and not a little pedantic. His father’s ridicule, and his own riper judgment, soon drive away these lazy dreams of boyhood ; and he next shines forth, a practical man of business, a politician of the Machiavellian school, full of intrigues for oversetting one cabinet of ministers, and for setting up another. In the meanwhile he figures as the man of *ton* ; flirts with the fair sex ; ingratiates himself into the confidence of my lord and lady, by furnishing one with a receipt for ‘tomahawk punch,’ and the other with a recipe for a sick poodle, till at length the whole concludes with a grand blow up of projects and personages, one of whom, his dearest friend too, Mr Vivian Grey, after having previously ruined, coolly shoots through the heart, and so the curtain drops.

The probability of the story cannot be very strongly contended for. Indeed one chief source of amusement is derived from the extreme composure with which the most barefaced ‘*mendacia poëtæ*’ are related. In short the book is a mere quiz from one end to the other, a sort of portfolio of caricatures of people of fashion, designed with infinite spirit, though somewhat overcolored. Vivian Grey affords one of the best portraits ; that of an agreeable, accomplished young rascal, who calmly cuts his way through every obstacle to his own schemes, and who seems to make up, by an extra fund of generosity and spirit, qualities so agreeable in a hero, for the deficiency of every other principle.

The Second Part introduces us into Germany, where Vivian Grey, after a year’s interval, is endeavoring to forget his disappointed schemes of ambition in the dissipation of a fashionable watering place. But he is no longer the same man, as in his days of hope and young ambition. Instead of the buoyant wit, who was wont to set the table in a roar, he subsides

into a commonplace sort of personage, very gentlemanlike, and somewhat sentimental. If his misfortunes have made him wiser, they have also made him a much sadder hero for romance than before. Here he gets deeply engaged in play, though somewhat against his inclination; and his happy star carries him triumphantly over all the chances of *rouge et noir*. All this leads to an interview with a couple of diplomatic black legs, whose knavery he exposes in a scene, executed in the very best style of our author. In the mean time Mr Grey falls deeply in love with an elderly English lady or her niece, for it is long uncertain which, until after a pretty assiduous courtship, he naturally discovers, that his passion for the former is only a respectable sort of admiration. This incipient attachment is unfortunately nipped in the bud, before it has full time to disclose itself. The adventure, though somewhat abrupt, is told with much eloquence and pathos, and we will cite it as a good specimen of our author's powers in this way.

‘The sun had already sunk behind the mountains, whose undulating forms were thrown into dark shadow against the crimson sky. The thin crescent of the new moon floated over the eastern hills, whose deep woods glowed with the rosy glories of twilight. Over the peak of a purple mountain, glittered the solitary star of evening. As the sun dropped, universal silence seemed to pervade the whole face of nature. The voice of the birds was stilled; the breeze, which had refreshed them during the day, died away, as if its office were now completed; and none of the dark sounds and sights of hideous night yet dared to triumph over the death of day. Unseen were the circling wings of the fell bat; unheard the screech of the waking owl; silent the drowsy hum of the shardborn beetle! What heart has not acknowledged the influence of this hour—the sweet and soothing hour of twilight!—the hour of love, the hour of adoration, the hour of rest!—when we think of those we love, only to regret that we have not loved more dearly; when we remember our enemies only to forgive them!

‘And Vivian and his beautiful companion owned the magic of this hour, as all must do—by silence. No word was spoken, yet is silence sometimes a language. They gazed, and gazed again, and their full spirits held due communion with the starlit sky, and the mountains, and the woods, and the soft shadows of the increasing moon. Oh! who can describe what the o’ercharged spirit feels at this sacred hour, when we almost lose the consciousness of existence, and our souls seem to struggle to pierce futurity! In the forest of the mysterious Odenwald, in the soli-

tudes of the Bergstrasse, had Vivian at this hour often found consolation for a bruised spirit—often in adoring Nature had forgotten man. But now, when he had never felt Nature's influence more powerful; when he had never forgotten man, and man's world more thoroughly; when he was experiencing emotions, which, though undefinable, he felt to be new; he started when he remembered that all this was in the presence of a human being! Was it Hesperus he gazed upon, or something else that glanced brighter than an evening star? Even as he thought that his gaze was fixed on the countenance of Nature, he found that his eyes rested on the face of Nature's loveliest daughter!

“Violet! dearest Violet!”

‘As in some delicious dream, the sleeper is awakened from his bliss by the sound of his own rapturous voice; so was Vivian roused by these words from his reverie, and called back to the world which he had forgotten. But ere a moment had passed he was pouring forth, in a rapid voice and incoherent manner, such words as men speak only once. He spoke of his early follies, his misfortunes, his misery; of his matured views, his settled principles, his plans, his prospects, his hopes, his happiness, his bliss; and when he had ceased, he listened, in his turn, to some small, still words, which made him the happiest of human beings. He bent down—he kissed the soft silken cheek which now he could call his own. Her hand was in his; her head sank upon his breast. Suddenly she clung to him with a strong grasp. “Violet!” my own, my dearest; you are overcome. I have been rash, I have been imprudent. Speak, speak, my beloved! say you are not ill.’

‘She spoke not, but clung to him with a fearful strength—her head still upon his breast, her full eyes closed. In the greatest alarm, he raised her off the ground, and bore her to the river side. Water might revive her. But when he tried to lay her a moment on the bank, she clung to him gasping, as a sinking person clings to a stout swimmer. He leant over her; he did not attempt to disengage his arms; and, by degrees, by very slow degrees, her grasp loosened. At last her arms gave way and fell by her side, and her eyes partly opened.

“Thank God! thank God! Violet, my own, my beloved, say you are better!”

‘She answered not—evidently she did not know him—evidently she did not see him. A film was on her sight, and her eye was glassy. He rushed to the waterside, and in a moment he had sprinkled her temples, now covered with a cold dew. Her pulse beat not; her circulation seemed suspended. He rubbed the palms of her hands; he covered her delicate feet with his coat; and then rushing up the bank into the road, he shouted with frantic cries on all sides. No one came; no one was near.

Again, with a cry of fearful anguish, he shouted as if a hyæna were feeding on his vitals. No sound :—no answer. The nearest cottage he remembered was above a mile off. He dared not leave her. Again he rushed down to the waterside. Her eyes were still open, still fixed. Her mouth also was no longer closed. Her hand was stiff—her heart had ceased to beat. He tried with the warmth of his own body to revive her. He shouted, he wept, he prayed. All, all in vain. Again he was in the road ; again shouting like an insane being. There was a sound. Hark !—It was but the screech of an owl !

‘ Once more at the riverside—once more bending over her with starting eyes—once more the attentive ear listening for the soundless breath. No sound ! not even a sigh ! Oh ! what would he have given for her shriek of anguish ! No change had occurred in her position, but the lower part of her face had fallen ; and there was a general appearance which struck him with awe. Her body was quite cold ; her limbs stiffened. He gazed, and gazed. He bent over her with stupor, rather than grief, stamped on his features. It was very slowly that the dark thought came over his mind—very slowly that the horrible truth seized upon his soul. He gave a loud shriek, and fell on the lifeless body of VIOLET FANE ! ’ pp. 160, 163.

We next find our hero, after a reasonable hiatus of some months, travelling in the forests of Southern Germany, accompanied by a facetious valet, made up of wit, mountebank, and bore ; the last predominant, and evidently a studied imitation of Shakspeare’s quaint oldfashioned clowns. Our travellers soon fall in with a party of jolly epicures, who are celebrating the glories of old Hock, in a tremendous drinking bout, that would do honor to the adventures of Baron Munchausen. Thence our hero proceeds to the court of a petty German prince, whose life he had accidentally saved at a boar hunt ; he becomes his confidential counsellor, accompanies him to a clandestine interview with the prime minister of a neighboring state, whose extraordinary humors furnish matter for three or four very comical chapters, much too long for insertion here. Thence he passes to the court of another grandee, and falls desperately in love with a fair *incognita*, proud, peevish, and ignorant, but uncommonly beautiful. This amour turns out quite as unfortunate as the preceding. The lady proves to be no less a personage, than the archduchess of Austria ; and, of course, notwithstanding a reciprocity of attachment, is far above the reach of our young plebeian. Upon this second disappointment, he again betakes himself to his knighterrantry, and

after a variety of small adventures, falls in with a tremendous hurricane, thunderstorm, and deluge, in the course of which a great lake is converted into a cataract, and the upper half of a mountain slides down on the heads of an unoffending village, just before the nose of our hero, who swoons away with excess of terror, and in this predicament is left at the end of the Second Part. Such is the fantastic conclusion of this most fantastical performance.

Through the whole of the work, the author's spirit moves very unequally ; sometimes taking a brave poetical flight, and sometimes flagging and floundering most heavily. Unlike 'Almack's,' it abounds in scenes of deep interest and high picturesque beauty, to arrive at which we are obliged to wade through long prosy pages of mere barrenness. On the whole, this Second Part is inferior to the first ; it is deficient in keeping, both as regards the hero, who, as we have before hinted, seems to have parted with his personal identity, and as regards the narrative, which is made up of a motley mixture of romance and reality, of rapid transition from the humdrum business of every day, to the most barefaced absurdities of Fairy land. We would not be understood as objecting to the *marvellous* ; but it should be introduced in its proper place, and made out of proper materials, of the airy stuff that 'dreams are made of,' not out of the coarse homespun of common life. The precept is as stale as Horace.

'Vivian Grey' is an obvious imitation of Byron's 'Don Juan.' It exhibits the same whimsical contrasts of sneer and sentiment, of deep passion and broad farce, of generous enthusiasm and chill misanthropy, of fashionable slang and prosy pedantry ; the same elegant wit, picturesque description, &c. with that eccentric production. To its credit, it has none of the licentiousness which taints Lord Byron's epic, but in common with 'Almack's,' 'Granby,' and some other recent novels, it seeks to heighten the interest by incentives not much more commendable ; we mean the piquant personalities with which all these works abound. The English complain that we Americans are a thinskinmed, irritable generation ; we hope it will be long before we can bear, without wincing, to have the veil of domestic privacy thus rudely torn asunder. Its influence—but in compassion to our readers, we will not broach a new argument at the close of an article, already too long protracted.